

**Planning Board
Meeting Minutes
May 25, 2023
5:00 PM-6:32 PM**

Planning Board Present: Chairman Mark Silverberg, Hazel Nourse, Peter Bouchard, Jon Pezzoni, John Gelcich

Also present: Kristen Belanger-Planning Dept. Administrative Assistant

Not present:

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Westborough Planning Board was held in the Great Hall of the Forbes Building at 45 West Main St, Westborough, MA 01581 on Thursday, May 25, 2023. Chairman Silverberg convened the meeting at 5:00 PM.

Chairman Silverberg reviewed the format for the interview of Jennifer Gringas. He will allow approximately 2 minutes per answer, he will allow one round of questioning. Each member will introduce themselves prior to the start of the question.

Chairman Silverberg introduced himself, he has been the chair for 4-5 years, he is on several committees and has 3 children that have attended school in town.

1. Please tell us why you are interested in this position and how your skills and experience have prepared you to serve as Westborough's next Town Planner.

Ms. Gingras is interested because it is the next step in her career. There is more of a commercial base than where she is currently at in Pepperell. She is interested in commercial development and downtown revitalization. This would be a great challenge for her. She would like her ideas implemented and see how it fits.

Member Bouchard has 4 kids in town, he is invested on how this town develops because he'd love for them to be able to stay in town as they become adults.

2. Please tell us what you know about the Town of Westborough, including current initiatives in which the Planning Department would be expected to have a role and what that role may be.

She googled Westborough and found out it was an agricultural community and had a couple Mill sites.

- Which of these initiatives do you find most exciting? Why?

LLRP seems like the focus is on downtown revitalization. She has so many ideas for downtown and what it could be. The Planner role is not just looking at a plan, it is looking at the community as a whole, looking 20 years out. She likes the creativity aspect.

Chairman Silverberg asked about her knowledge and experience with the Housing Choice Zoning Act?

Pepperell is not an MBTA community. She knows about zoning through the regional planning office. She attends their discussion and has heard trainings.

Chairman Silverberg asked about experience with multi use trails.

There are grant opportunities to enhance the trail systems. She would need to understand the whole picture and one way to do this is to get into the community to gauge this.

Member Nourse introduced herself and explained that she is one of the members of a farming family in town.

3. Describe one aspect of the Westborough's Zoning Bylaws that you feel is good and one aspect which you feel can be improved. Why?

Ms. Gingras feels it is good that there is a Commercial Business District and the Industrial zone is separate from Residential. Active Reuse policy is important, towns are losing historic buildings and they need to be allowed to be used for something other than original use. In Pepperell they changed zoning to include historic building reuse for religious and municipal structures. The Zoning change was made through town meetings. They had public outreach. Originally, included historic homes, feedback in Pepperell did not want to see them for multifamily or restaurant etc. so they were removed.

Member Gelcich is a new member of the board, he has lived in town for 8 years.

4. Please describe a major development project proposal that you have reviewed and advised on, and include any challenges that arose.

There was an Old Mill site where they demolished the mill building 10 years ago. Site was challenging with underground water structures from a previous paper factory. It was partially in a flood plain. Developer has come multiple times, and participated in a design review with her team. Similar to Westborough's one stop meeting. The project has not submitted the application to the board yet.

There was a warehouse development 600k sq. ft. She has been handling the project throughout the process, she captures neighborhood concern before it gets to the Planning Board. It is across the street from a neighborhood so there is a lot of interest.

Member Pezzoni moved to town in 2020. He is new to the board.

5. You go to check a site for conformance to the Design Review Committee's requirements, as recorded in a Planning Board decision. You find that the developer has largely not followed the design as approved. What would you do, how would you proceed?

- Would you hold up the Certificate of Occupancy, from a Planning sign-off?
It depends, either a phone call or a site visit. Important to figure out if there has been a miscommunication or the mistake was intentional. She would inform the Building Commissioner so he can be brought in to determine next steps.

Before she was a Planner, there was a developer that put in a common driveway in the wrong location, 8 ft. away from where it was supposed to go, in a wetland. Not found out until the Planner was supposed to sign off on the last COO. Delivery truck sunk in the driveway the same week. Building commissioner issued a stop work order. They need to come back to Planning Board with a new plan. Planning Board has finally approved a new plan.

Chairman Silverberg asked the following question.

6. Role of and Relationship with the Planning Board:

- a) How do you build and manage relationships with Board members?

She would communicate with everyone without violating open meeting law. She cannot make a decision for the Planning Board but can advise and educate them. She issues memos so the board can make a valid decision. She will look to other Dept. heads to tell her how to make an informed decision. She admits she is not the most knowledgeable on Engineering. She will rely on the expert's opinion.

- b) What is the biggest challenge you have faced in maintaining a productive relationship with board or committee members?
- c) Should a Board defer to a Planner's recommendations? Why or why not?
- d) How will you prepare the Planning Board and Applicant for the meeting and deliberation process of any matters before the Board?
- e) Potential follow up Q re: frequency (and manner) of communication with the Chair, with the full Board?

Member Bouchard asked the following question.

7. Tell us about a time when you had to manage a difficult situation with a resident or other stakeholder who was upset and disagreed with a Planning Board decision. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

She was working on a revision for zoning that included accessory apartments. One board member was adamantly against it. She resolved the situation by asking to speak to them outside of the meeting and reminding them any comments needs to be constructive criticism.

Member Nourse asked following question.

8. The Town Planner is a staff liaison to the Master Plan Implementation Committee. What is your experience with the Master Plan process? What does Westborough's Master Plan suggest is the vision its residents have for its future.

She has been involved in the Master Plan process. Pepperell adopted their Master Plan in 2020. She was on the Planning Board as a member at the time. There is a MPIT (Master Plan Implementation Team)

She helped to narrow down people on MPIT, they named 3 people total; one Select Board member, one citizen and one Planning Board member. She created a spreadsheet and wrote down priorities. She does check in twice per year on how items are coming along. At Town Meeting they show how many are implemented and in progress, not started etc. Recently they had a joint meeting with Select Board to reevaluate priorities. They have a third party firm, a planning agency, moderate and crossed off priorities that were finished or changed and not a priority any longer.

Member Nourse asked if her Master Plan process has stopped using the community for feedback at this point.

She responded they are using their committee to do the outreach to the community.

Chairman Silverberg asked if she provides updates to the town.

A Planning Board member helps her prepare the update and the member gives the update at Town Meeting. A percentage of completion is asked but this is not working at this time. They ask for updates 2x per year.

9. Westborough has numerous historic structures in the Downtown, some of these are underutilized with vacant upper stories. How would you go about balancing the need for redevelopment with the historic context and character of the town center.

She believes the Town has to be more flexible with what they allow for uses. People want them saved but use is important. Mixed use where there is residential above and retail below is optimal. This creates sense of place, people take pride in where they live. Historically speaking, this is how buildings were used.

Member Pezzoni asked her to elaborate more on form based code in downtown area.

She is working on a bylaw that implements form based code. Planning Board may know what they want a building to look like architecturally, so it is not out of place. This would dictate aesthetics only. No use of artificial turf, only use native plants, street trees every eight feet, etc. They have adopted design standards in her community.

10. What technologies do you rely on most to be effective in your role? Do you have Permitting software experience? GIS experience?

She uses permitting software, View Point Cloud, it is different than Permit Pro which is used in Westborough. She is on GIS every day. She does not prefer paper, mostly stays with paperless.

Chairman Silverberg asked the following question.

11. Have you had any experience applying for grants? If yes, describe a successful application, its purpose, value and result.

She applied for a shared streets and spaces grant-Pepperell had 5 conceptual plans going back to 1965. Expanding sidewalks, allowing street scapes, safer crosswalks, more handicap parking. She applied for the grant and was working with engineering to develop a conceptual plan. They were awarded the grant. The biggest issue was parking, they were able to mitigate by making changes in other areas.

She received a grant for some rotary changes.

They have plans to renovate a town hall building through the Mass Historic grant. They have had plans to do it for the last 30 years.

Member Bouchard asked.

12. Imagine you were able to find the time (and resources were not an issue/constraint) in your current position to implement a new initiative. What would it be and why do you feel it is worthwhile?

She would love to work on an open space residential development. She knows this deters a lot of developers. It creates space in a small neighborhood. Many developers would rather do a 40B.

Chairman Silverberg asked final questions.

13. Concluding Questions:

- Do you wish to elaborate on any of the answers you have provided today? Or is there anything else you would like for us to know as we consider your candidacy?

She mentioned she has 3 acre farm. She has animals and a large garden. She thinks this needs to be kept in a community.

- Do you have any questions for us?

What does Planning Board envision in the role of the Planner.

- John Gelcich would like to see downtown revitalization past the railroad line on Rt. 9. More engagement with board members prior to meetings.

One week prior she sends out packet which includes her memo. She explains what the project is, background and then what board is looking at and how to get to a decision. She sometimes recommends conditions.

Member Nourse asked about commercial developers. What process would she use to talk to a developer about a possible project.

If they had a conceptual plan, she would invite them to talk to staff at a one stop meeting. She would need to understand how this fits with the Master Plan overall.

Chairman Silverberg expects the next Town Planner will be good at collaborating with all town dept.'s and available resources to solve problems.

Deliberation:

If committee appoints the candidate it would be subject to satisfactory background check. Kim Foster would engage in negotiating an offer.

Chairman Silverbreg values Kristi Williams, Town Manager and Fred Lonardo, Community Development Director's opinion and would like to hear their input.

Mr. Lonardo thought her answers were pretty good overall. She has some direction and background. Criticism is she doesn't have a lot of experience. She worked in Lexington with a background in zoning. She will be looking to do things outside of the box and will get involved in grant writing.

Ms. Williams thought she spoke knowledgeably on the process in her town. She presented in a way she thought where she would be a good member of the team. There will be an evolution of the Planning Board in terms of technology that she could support. She would have a lot of support from the board and town departments.

Member Nourse's main concern is the lack of experience in large scale business development. She is more familiar with small residential. No experience with commercial developments like the old BJ's, Computer Dr etc. Not as well rounded as a Planner as she would like to see.

Member Pezzoni thinks her written response was strong. He is concerned with working with developers on commercial types of things.

Chairman Silverberg was impressed that she is confident to learn what she doesn't know. She has no housing choice knowledge currently. He liked her adaptive reuse answer. She would be eager to develop consensus. He is intrigued by form based zoning. Would like to explore it more.

Member Nourse doesn't think it would apply to this town.

Member Bouchard agrees with Member Pezzoni that the written application is fantastic. He is not ready to make a decision with only one candidate to choose from. He does not think the board is ready to do that yet.

Ms. Foster explained the process. Planning Board is the appointing authority, the search committee screened the applications, applicants could be interviewed in executive session for the search committee. They would send at least 2 people to the Planning Board. The Search committee cannot do a screening for 1 applicant. They had two applicants to start and one dropped out so she was sent directly to the Board.

Member Gelcich thinks her application is boiler plate. He was impressed with her enthusiasm in engaging the community. He is concerned with the educational aspect. She could learn on the job. He doesn't feel prepared coming in to meetings. Mr. Robbins had all the institutional knowledge but it was not shared with the board. He likes that someone new might be willing to try something innovative since they may not have been burned in the past.

Member Nourse's problem is she didn't go before the Search committee for a screening first. That process would have vet candidates better. Ms. Gingras mentioned this is her next step in her career. She may not be here 25 years.

Member Gelcich thinks it is unfair to ask someone to stay for long time. That is tough to predict for anyone.

Chairman Silverberg was impressed, she was put on the spot with a lot of questions. Her answers were readily available.

Member Gelcich thought she was pretty composed considering this is a public interview.

Member Nourse is hoping she can stand up to her position and doesn't get influenced by other people and she can be her own person.

Chairman Silveberg thinks she has been running land use meetings and that shows fortitude.

Member Bouchard asked if the board thought she could stand up to other depts. When given push back?

Chairman Silverberg thinks she will prepare the board to make a decision.

Member Gelcich thinks this can be flushed out in checking her references.

Member Nourse wants to make sure this person champions boards decisions.

Member Bouchard feels like decisions have been formed and the Planning Board is solely there to vote.

Member Gelcich feels he is not as prepared as he wants to be when coming to meetings. He feels like she can incorporate and tailor what she does for the board.

Chairman Silverberg doesn't feel like Planning Board initiates grant applications as much as it should. He likes her comments about downtown, sense of place.

Member Gelcich thinks preserving character of the town is important. Her comments pointed to historic preservation.

Member Nourse respected Member Gelcich's opinion that he felt she was a qualified candidate.

Chairman Silverberg made a motion to appoint Jennifer Gingras to the position of Director of Planning subject to a satisfactory background check. Member Bouchard seconded.

Vote: 5-0

Member Nourse made a motion to adjourn at 6:32 pm. Member Bouchard seconded.

Vote: 5-0

Respectfully Submitted by Kristen Belanger, Planning Dept. Admin. Assistant

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kristen Belanger', is written over a horizontal line.

**One board member signature required for approval.*